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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses domestic violence, examining its epidemiology for the general population and for two Asian American groups. It reviews data from 10 empirical studies on domestic violence among Asian American women. Qualitative studies stress the impact of family ties, family honor, and shame; religious values; fear of the legal system; and racism and minority status. Quantitative studies show that wife abuse relates to length of residency, acculturation level, status inconsistency, traditionalism, rigid adherence to sex role performance, partner's alcohol use, and lack of social contact. Research indicates that Asian American women are unable to leave abusive situations. The 1994 Violence Against Women Act helps undocumented battered women petition for their own permanent resident status. Evidence shows that mental health services are underutilized for domestic violence issues among Asian American women, and it notes the need for culturally sensitive interventions, outreach, and treatments for battered Asian American women. The paper reviews research on interventions, including battered women's shelters, crisis hotlines, support groups, and legal advocacy, as well as more focused clinical treatments (unilateral, bilateral, and dyadic). It examines advantages and disadvantages of family systems interventions for domestic violence, noting the paucity of research in this area. (Contains 32 references.) (SM)

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RISK FACTORS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS

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RISK FACTORS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS

Despite the silence which shrouds the Asian American community around issues of domestic violence[1], there is evidence that wife battering continues to be a significant concern (c.f., Lum, 1998), demanding immediate attention. In this paper, I will examine the following issues: a) scope of the problem of domestic violence; b) epidemiology (prevalence rates) for both the general US population and specific Asian American ethnic groups; c) family structure, roles, and stressors that may influence domestic violence issues among Asian Americans; d) generic and culturally-specific risk factors for domestic violence in Asian American families; and e) family systems interventions. In conclusion, I will offer some directions for possible future research.

The problem of wife battering has gained both national and international attention, particularly in the wake of the women's movement of the 1970's. The United Nations, for instance, has emphasized the importance of eliminating domestic violence worldwide through special task force committees, resolutions, and policies. In their resource manual, Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence, the United Nations declares: "The right to be free from domestic violence or threat of domestic violence is a fundamental and universal human right" (United Nations Office at Vienna, 1993, p. 11). However, the United Nations (specifically, UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women) has also gathered information on the incidence of wife-abuse around the world

[1] For the purpose of this paper, I will use Straus & Gelles' (1986) definition of violence: "act that is intended, or perceived to be intended to cause physical harm or injury." Also, I will use the terms "wife battering," "abuse," and "physical abuse" interchangeably as meaning physical abuse. I acknowledge that abuse is much broader than merely physical, and encompasses psychological, sexual, and property abuse. This narrow definition is used here to lend more focus to this paper and because it reflects the information in the currently available literature.

which reveals that wife battering is common in countries such as: Bangladesh, Barbados, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Norway, and Sri Lanka. The problem is clearly cross-cultural in nature.

In the United States, two nationally representative surveys conducted by Straus and Gelles (in 1975 and 1985) have documented the prevalence of domestic violence. These investigators have estimated that over 1.6 million women are beaten yearly in US (Straus and Gelles, 1986). Browne (1993) has cited prevalence rates ranging from 21% to 34% for "women who will be physically assaulted by an intimate male partner during adulthood" (Browne, 1993, p. 1077). In response to these alarming rates and the need for focused attention on issues of domestic violence, the APA's Committee on Women in Psychology established a Task Force on Male Violence against Women in 1991. The Task Force was mandated to: "review current research on the prevalence, causes, and impact of several different forms of violence against women, to describe community-based and clinical interventions, and to recommend legal changes and policy initiatives to address the problem" (Goodman, Koss, Fitzgerald, Russo, & Keita, 1993).

Although the problem of domestic violence is beginning to garner the attention it deserves, there are still many populations "hidden" to both researchers and care providers. Asian American women are one such group, particularly in the area of wife battering. Currently, there are no nationally representative studies that have examined prevalence rates for domestic violence among Asian Americans. However, two smaller-scale studies have estimated the prevalence of wife abuse in two Asian ethnic groups. First, Song (1996) found that 60% of the Korean immigrant women (N=150) sampled in her survey reported being physically abused by her partner in the past year. Song used a snowball sampling method as well as local directories in the Chicago area to obtain these

participants; although this sampling method may have led to inflated prevalence rates, this was one of the first studies to examine domestic violence in the Korean American community. The second study (Tran, 1997) estimated a lifetime prevalence rate of 53% for domestic violence among Vietnamese female refugees and immigrants (N=30) in Boston, as well as a current prevalence rate of 37%. These participants were recruited consecutively through a local civic association based on the following criteria: a) currently living with a partner (or had lived with a partner during the past year); and b) spoke Vietnamese fluently. These domestic violence prevalence rates are much higher than (even twice as high as) the rate cited above for the general US population. This contrast reveals the urgency of the problem of domestic violence in Asian American families.

The question arises: Why are the rates of domestic violence so much higher among Asian Americans? In order to explain the findings from studies on domestic violence in the Asian American community, several researchers (e.g., Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996; Rhee, 1997; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997; Yim, 1978) have turned to sociocultural frameworks. In particular, family structure, roles, cultural values, and immigration/adaptation stressors have been examined more closely as possible influences in domestic violence among Asian Americans. In the following section, I will briefly describe how these variables have been implicated in the Asian American domestic violence research literature.

A caveat: in the following discussion of "Asian American" families, I must acknowledge the vast range of within group differences that are masked by this umbrella term and the between group diversity of various Asian ethnic groups. Some of the descriptions may not fit for some Asian American families, nor perhaps for some Asian

ethnic groups. However, a general understanding will be helpful for discussing the findings on domestic violence.

First, the family structure of Asian American families tends to be hierarchical and patriarchal (Uba, 1994). That is, communication tends to be unidirectional, flowing from the parents to the children (or from senior to younger), and males tend to dominate (i.e., the father) or have favored status (Yee, Huang, & Lew, 1998). For instance, sons are often given more privileges than daughters (Lee, 1989). In addition, the family itself is thought to include not only the nuclear members, but also the extended family as well as past ancestors. Great value is placed on bringing honor to the family and avoiding shame or loss of face for the family. Within Asian cultures, the family unit is given precedence over individual interests (reinforcing a collectivistic orientation) and interdependence and harmonious relationships are desired (Uba, 1994).

Within the family structure, specific roles and obligations are prescribed for different family members according to certain cultural values rooted in Confucianism (Uba, 1994). In Asian families, the father tends to be the dominant authority figure who is the primary decision-maker, while the mother is the nurturing caretaker of the children. The cultural value of filial piety is one central concept which governs intergenerational relations in Asian families (Lin & Liu, 1993; Yu, 1984). Children are expected to obey and respect their parents as well as the elderly, and to care for their parents when they grow old. Among the subsystems in Asian families, the parent-child subsystem is considered the most important, and the wife's strongest emotional attachment is usually to her children, not to her husband (Lee, 1989).

The marital subsystem is greatly influenced by cultural values and attitudes as well. In many traditional families, marriages are arranged to safeguard family prosperity

and to extend the male's patrilineage rather than on the basis of romantic love (Lee, 1989). When a woman marries, she is expected to leave her own family of origin to join her husband and her in-laws. Marriage is male-dominated, and females are looked upon more as the husband's property or possession (Almirol, 1991; Cimmarusti, 1992; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996), while the wife tends to believe that she has no rights to property, wealth, or to her children (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Ho, 1990; Tran, 1997).

Gender roles are also prescribed by cultural norms which place the woman in a subservient position. Confucian teachings, for example, exhort a woman to follow a doctrine of "three obediences" during her lifetime: to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son after her husband's death (Chan & Leong, 1994). In addition to the duties described above, the husband is also expected to be the family's provider and disciplinarian, while the wife is expected to perform the household tasks and to help her mother-in-law. Self-sacrifice, silent suffering, and perseverance are held up as valued virtues for women (Ho, 1990; Lum, 1998), especially in marriage because "divorce is rare and brings family shame" (Lee, 1989, p. 105).

Finally, the process of immigration and adaptation to life in the US brings many stressors for Asian American families that may shed light on issues of domestic violence. Shon and Ja (1992) describe the culture shock and psychological stressors that many immigrant families face. In addition, recent immigrants are faced with language barriers, limited economic resources, lack of familiarity with service systems, minority status and related prejudice/discrimination/racism, and social isolation. Some common factors which may increase stress on the marital subsystem include: status inconsistency (e.g., pre-immigration level of education is inconsistent with current occupation, especially for the husband), downward job mobility, role reversals (between parents and children; may

cause parents loss of face), and the loss of extended family support. All of these family dynamics, roles, value orientations, and stressors are relevant to the following discussion of risk factors for domestic violence among Asian Americans.

Out of ten empirical studies reviewed on domestic violence among Asian American women (Abraham, 1995; Campbell, 1992; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996; Song, 1996; Tang, 1997; Tran, 1997; Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997; and Yim, 1978), there were five qualitative studies (Abraham, 1995; Campbell, 1992; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996) and five quantitative studies (Song, 1996; Tang, 1997; Tran, 1997; Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997; and Yim, 1978). Each set will be discussed in turn.

I will first review some of the main trends found in the qualitative studies. Each of these investigators used naturalistic-ethnographic designs, including the grounded theory method as well as focus groups, interviews, secondary sources, and observations. All five studies addressed the following issues: a) patriarchy, the power differential between the sexes, and sex roles; b) traditional attitudes towards marriage; c) the woman's (in)ability to leave; and, d) the need for culturally sensitive interventions and sanctions (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Campbell, 1992; Ho, 1990). In four of the five studies (the only exception being Campbell's anthropological analysis), the importance of these factors was stressed: family ties, family honor, and shame; religious values (Buddhism, Christianity, fate, Hinduism, etc.); fear of the legal system and police; racism and minority status (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Ho, 1990).

Out of the five quantitative studies, only three focused mainly on domestic violence among Asian American women (Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yim, 1978). Because the other

two studies either focused on Chinese women in Hong Kong (Tang, 1997) or examined perceptions of domestic violence (Yick & Agbayani-Siewert, 1997), I will restrict my analysis to the three studies on actual cases of domestic violence among Asian Americans in the US. These three investigators used survey instruments, interviews, and statistical and case materials to study domestic violence among Korean Americans and Vietnamese refugee women. The following factors were found to be associated with wife abuse: length of residency in the US, acculturation level, status inconsistency (educational and occupational), traditionalism (attitudes towards wife-husband relations), rigid adherence to sex-role performance, partner alcohol use, and lack of social contact (Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yim, 1978). Each of these qualitative and quantitative findings will now be synthesized and explained more fully, incorporating elements from the literature on Asian American families described above, as appropriate.

First, many of these findings were culture-specific, and may be explained by the immigrant status and cultural values of these Asian American families. The process of immigration and adjustment to a new country involves many physical, material, cognitive, and affective stressors (Shon & Ja, 1985). Both the qualitative and quantitative studies highlighted the special needs of Asian American families due to the nature of these transitions. Song (1996) found that three times as many women who reported being physically abused had lived in the US for only 3-5 years. Tran (1997) emphasized the importance of assessing pre-immigration experiences of Vietnamese refugees in her study, as she described the respondents' traumas of fleeing a war-torn country and witnessing the atrocities of war. Thus, length of residency in the US and acculturation level were two important variables that were associated with domestic violence in these studies.

Status inconsistency (educational and occupational) often contributes to increased tensions between husband and wife that may also lead to wife abuse. The husbands in Song's (1996) study, for example, often had to find jobs in the US that were of lower occupational status and required less education compared to jobs they held in Korea; these conditions may lead to greater frustration in the husbands. Accordingly, Song (1996) found that status inconsistency in pre- versus post-immigration employment status of battering men, compared to non-battering men, was found to be a predictor of wife abuse in Korean families; significantly more battering men had lower employment levels after immigration compared to non-abusive men. Tran (1997) reported a similar pattern of results: abused Vietnamese refugee women, compared to non-abused Vietnamese refugee women, reported significantly less partner occupational satisfaction.

Another perpetrator-related trait linked to domestic violence is alcohol use, which has been linked to the physical abuse of wives in the general domestic violence literature as well (e.g., Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990). In Tran's study (1997), abused women reported a higher frequency of partner drinking behavior, when compared to non-abused women. A significant positive relationship was also found between severity of verbal (but not physical) abuse and frequency of partner drinking (i.e., higher frequencies of partner's drinking behavior were significantly correlated with greater verbal abuse among Vietnamese refugee women). Rhee (1997) has also noted "a strong relationship between drinking and wife battering in Korean immigrant families" (p. 72). She makes a cultural argument by citing high tolerance and permissiveness towards male drinking in the Korean culture, and refers to one study which found that alcohol abuse and dependence were exceptionally high among Korean males (unlike other Asian groups) in Los Angeles (Chi, Lubben, & Kitano, 1989 as cited by Rhee, 1997).

Next, patriarchy, power differentials between the sexes, and adherence to rigid sex-roles were common themes across qualitative and quantitative studies (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Campbell, 1992; Ho, 1990; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yim, 1978). Yim (1978) found that Korean men placed greater emphasis on male dominance and less emphasis on equality of decision-making between husbands and wives, when compared to European American men. Both Song (1996) and Tran (1997) found that battered women (recent Korean immigrants and Vietnamese refugees) tended to adhere to rigid sex-roles more so than non-battered women. In Song's study, this variable was operationalized by asking respondents to indicate whether the wife, husband, or both perform(s) certain household chores, such as: cooking, laundry, paying bills, making decisions to buy something, and cleaning. Results show that Korean couples divided these chores along gender-specific lines, such that females performed household duties, while the males appropriated the more powerful positions of decision-maker and disciplinarian. In addition, Tran (1997) also found that abused women (vs. non-abused women) held more traditional attitudes towards domestic violence (greater tolerance).

These sex-roles are heavily influenced by Confucian cultural values of patriarchy and family hierarchy as described above. As Huisman (1996) notes, the patriarchal ideology embedded in cultural norms may sanction or minimize the problem of domestic violence in the Asian American community. In a review of the general literature on domestic violence, Feldman and Ridley (1995) have noted mixed findings on the associations between sex-role expectations and wife battering. In particular, Feldman and Ridley cite a review by Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) in which they found that men's traditional sex-role expectations and male-dominated decision-making were "consistently unrelated" to wife assault. However, other investigators have found positive associations;

for instance, Finn (1986) found a moderately positive relationship between traditional sex role preferences and attitudes supporting domestic violence. Thus, the consistent findings of associations between domestic violence and rigid sex-role adherence among Asian Americans appear to be somewhat unique, in that the general domestic violence literature findings are a bit more ambiguous.

Traditional attitudes towards marriage was another theme that cut across both qualitative and quantitative studies (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Campbell, 1992; Ho, 1990; Song, 1996; Tran, 1997; Yim, 1978). The ideals of the "good" wife portrayed through the qualitative studies are striking in their similarities and degree of restriction. Dasgupta and Warrier (1996) describe how their respondents were socialized to believe that a "good" wife should sacrifice personal freedom and autonomy for the sake of the family, and to fit the Hindu norms prescribed for women to be "good, benevolent, dutiful, controlled" as well as "chaste, virtuous, traditional, nurturant, and obedient." (p. 242). Ho (1990) also illustrates traditional attitudes towards marriage among Southeast Asian refugees through the assumption that the wife is considered the husband's property and that she has not right to a divorce, the children, her own property or other means of support. In addition, marriages were often pre-arranged which reinforced the notion of lack of control or power. Suffering, enduring hardship, and perseverance are also considered valued virtues for women, as stated previously (Ho, 1996).

These themes were confirmed through the quantitative studies as well. Song (1996) measured Korean immigrant women's traditional attitudes through a questionnaire which tapped into attitudes towards marital interaction, dating & marriage, childrearing, and old Korean beliefs. A strong positive correlation was found between traditionalism and

level of abuse; she argued that tolerance and endurance are traditions in Korean culture that may foster putting up with the abuse. Tran (1997) also found that abused (vs. non-abused) Vietnamese refugee women held more traditional attitudes towards women's roles in society. Again, these traditional attitudes reflect the influence of cultural values and beliefs about marital relations (e.g., Lee, 1989).

Another pattern found in the qualitative studies was the Asian American woman's inability to leave the abusive situation. Many of the variables already discussed (attitudes towards marriage, for example) help to explain why Asian American women may stay with an abusive partner. Other factors that may hinder Asian American women from leaving or seeking help may be found among those that emerged from four of the five studies, as listed above: family ties, family honor and shame; religious values (Buddhism, Christianity, fate, Hinduism, etc.); fear of the legal system and police; racism and minority status (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Ho, 1990). An Asian American woman's collectivistic orientation and strong sense of stigma and shame related to airing "dirty laundry" in public may prevent her from leaving an abusive situation. In addition, Abraham (1995) indicated that religious institutions (temples, mosques, churches) may influence Asian American women's decisions towards staying with their husbands. Ho (1995) also noted that clergy may pressure Asian American women to stay with their families, and that other religious beliefs such as reincarnation, paying dues for past lives, or belief in fate or destiny can also prevent Asian American women from help-seeking. Fear of the legal system and the police may be remnants from negative past experiences in their home countries with corrupt authorities (Huisman, 1996); there may also be a fear of deportation. One solution that may provide recourse for immigrant battered women is the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), passed in 1994

by President Clinton. This legislation allows undocumented battered women to petition for their own permanent resident status. There is also the high probability that many Asian American immigrant women may not know their legal rights or may be unfamiliar with various services (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996). Finally, Asian American women's minority status may prevent them from help-seeking or cause them to experience covert racism in their attempts to seek help---for instance, through culturally insensitive interventions in the mental health system (Ho, 1990; Huisman, 1996). The quantitative studies also show that the abused woman's lack of social contact may be related to her inability to leave the abusive situation. Song's (1996) results revealed a significant difference between battered versus non-battered women in their frequency of going out, participation in clubs and organizations, and frequency of talking to friends or relatives. In sum, battered women were more socially isolated than non-battered women. This result is seen in the general literature as well (c.f., Walker, 1979).

In addition, there is evidence which shows that mental health services are underutilized for domestic violence issues, especially among Asian American women. For instance, Song (1996) reports that the battered Korean women in her sample underutilized mental health services due to the shame and stigma attached to seeking help for domestic violence and simply the lack of knowledge of available services. She also noted that the top two coping strategies for these women were: a) waiting: 42% believed that "time" would resolve their problems; and, b) keeping the problem in the family (35%). Tran (1997) found that the severity of abuse determined help seeking from agencies in her sample of abused Vietnamese refugee women; that is, more severe abuse was significantly positively correlated with seeking help from agencies. Also, she found that a more feminist sex role attitude was significantly positively related with confiding in

friends (but not family or agencies) about the abuse. Thus, Asian American women's ability to leave their abusive situations is hindered by both cultural values and beliefs as well as lack of access to resources caused by unfamiliarity with available services or social isolation.

Finally, all five qualitative studies noted the need for culturally sensitive interventions among battered Asian American women and sanctions against domestic violence (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Huisman, 1996; Campbell, 1992; Ho, 1990). Huisman (1996) specifically argues that "Asian women's needs differ markedly from women in the general population" (p. 271) and that their special needs include language needs, cultural issues, outreach methods, and advocacy needs. First, because of language barriers, Asian women may need interpreters in the shelters or other care settings. However, both Huisman (1996) and Ho (1990) warn that that sometimes, the use of interpreters can be problematic or even detrimental if they offer their own opinions and alter what is being said to the battered women.

Second, cultural issues also need to be considered in developing more sensitive treatments to increase utilization of services by battered Asian American women. For example, Huisman (1996) suggested offering Asian food at women's shelters and providing detailed explanations of the unfamiliar service system, and Ho (1990) advises staffing women's shelters with bilingual In terms of clinical interventions, Ho (1990) also recommends the use of cultural resources such as elders in the community who can intervene or offer support as well as utilizing cultural mechanisms of social control such as guilt or shame to inhibit future abuse and respect for law and order. In addition, the treatment should be matched to the individual's acculturation level. At the same time, Ho (1990) also cautioned against the use of culture as an excuse for abuse. In fact, she urges

consciousness-raising and community level interventions to facilitate the examination of gender inequality in Asian cultures, education on safety rights, and looking at child-rearing practices.

Third, outreach methods need to be tailored to the Asian American community. Huisman (1996) noted that the most effective methods tend to be community-based approaches such as spreading information word-of-mouth and literature distribution in the various Asian languages in local stores, beauty salons, and churches. These kinds of outreach methods are important considering the high degree of underreporting in this population, the lack of familiarity or misinformation about one's legal rights, fear of deportation, rejection from the community, and fear of legal and government authorities. Abraham (1995) and Dasgupta and Warrier (1996) have also emphasized the importance of reaching out to South Asian women in particular to provide them with legal, psychological, and economic support. Both authors have documented the seriousness of day-to-day wife battering in this segment of the Asian population and the continued existence of the more extreme and sensationalized "dowry deaths" and "bride burnings" (Abraham, 1995; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996). Delay in seeking treatment was graphically illustrated in the case of the twelve women who were interviewed by Dasgupta and Warrier (1996); all twelve women suffered abuse for 7.4 years on average before requesting help from Manavi, a pioneering South Asian women's organization in New Jersey. Finally, Campbell, (1992) after conducting a cross-cultural anthropological analysis of wife battering in various societies world-wide, observed that "societal structures and anticipatory community mechanisms can overcome individual propensities to violence" (p. 23). In light of this insight from her data, Campbell (1992) calls for action

at the neighborhood level with respect to providing sanctions and public censure against wife battering and sanctuaries for women (e.g., shelters).

Given the dire needs present in the Asian American community for interventions for domestic violence, what is the empirical evidence for the effectiveness of certain treatments? Unfortunately, there are no controlled studies that have assessed the effectiveness of interventions for domestic violence among Asian Americans in particular. Thus, in this section I will examine the research literature on interventions for the general US population, with special emphasis on family systems approaches. The more general forms of interventions for domestic violence have included: battered women's shelters, crisis hotlines, support groups, and legal advocacy.

More focused clinical treatments currently implemented for domestic violence have usually fallen into three types of (much debated) formats: a) unilateral; b) bilateral; and c) dyadic (Feldman & Ridley, 1995). In unilateral treatments, each partner is seen independently in either one-on-one or group counseling. For males, the vast majority of unilateral treatment in the US are short-term (10-16 weeks) group programs. Bilateral interventions are based on the assumption of an intact relationship, and both partners are expected to make changes, while working towards a common goals. However, as in unilateral interventions, counseling is still conducted separately (for safety reasons) in either individual or group sessions. In dyadic treatments, however, the couple is seen conjointly (either in a group of couples or just the couple themselves). Each partner is considered to be responsible for his/her contribution to the problematic interactions and participating in therapeutic activities. Dyadic treatments have been the most controversial form, receiving the most intense critiques from feminist clinicians and researchers. These

critiques mainly center around issues of safety for the victim and the blurring of responsibility; more will be discussed later in the discussion of systems approaches.

Since the use of dyadic treatments is so debated, several guidelines have been established to guide their implementation only under specific conditions. One set of guidelines comes from Jennings & Jennings (1991; cited by Feldman & Ridley, 1995), and these authors would recommend the use of dyadic treatment only when: a) both members of couple want dyadic treatment; b) the violence has a relationship basis; that is, the couple can commit to improving their relationship; c) the abuser is willing to contract to refraining from future violence; d) violence is in the "mild to moderate" range; e) there is no evidence of a psychiatric disorder; f) violence is the "expressive" type, NOT the "instrumental" type[2]; and, g) there are few or no indicators of lethality (e.g., use of weapons). These conditions highlight the caution with which therapists should utilize dyadic treatment with clients presenting with domestic violence issues.

Next, I will briefly review some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with family systems interventions for domestic violence. Gelles & Maynard (1987) have advocated the use of a systems approach for domestic violence, noting several beneficial aspects of family systems interventions. For instance, these authors state that the multidimensional nature of family violence requires treatment at a family level and that individual treatment is inadequate. They also caution that a family systems approach should only be used when violence is in the "mild to moderate" range, as mentioned above. Yet, they also note that these less severe forms of spousal abuse are the most common. According to Gelles & Maynard (1987), the prevalence and nature of mutual

violence also needs more attention. They also state that this approach offers a more "flexible" definition of domestic violence by not citing sexism as the sole cause of violence.

On the flip side, many scholars have argued against the use of systems approaches, particularly from a feminist perspective (Bograd, 1984; Feldman & Ridley, 1995). This feminist critique first raises the question of the victim's safety. In a family systems treatment, there is concern that the batterer may have more opportunity to inflict abuse on the victim. Traditional "therapeutic neutrality" may do more harm than good in cases of domestic violence and would be inappropriate; there is the danger of colluding with the batterer and "blaming the victim." Bograd (1984) also argues that systemic approaches can minimize violence as "just another problem" so that the violence loses its emotional and physical reality through overcontextualization. Specifically, the violence may be interpreted as merely a sign of deeper, underlying systemic dysfunctions or the violence may be abstractly defined away as a "homeostatic mechanism." In addition, a systemic formulation can be biased if it is used to blame the victim or excuse the perpetrator. Bograd (1984) states, "It is erroneous to conclude from this formulation that both partners are equally accountable for the violent incident because functional descriptions of process are *not* equivalent to moral assessments of responsibility."(p. 561). Systems language in and of itself also contributes to a diffusion of responsibility; for instance, terms such as, "violent couples", and "battering system" mask the fact that husbands are usually the violent abuser, and women, the victims. Finally, systems approaches may ignore societal

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[2] These two forms of violence were originally coined by Straus & Gelles, 1979, and later expanded by Neidig & Friedman, 1984. Expressive violence refers to an expression of emotion, used to cause physical/ psychological injury as end in itself, while instrumental violence is seen as a tool for social control.

factors, particularly social norms and gender inequalities in the larger society that sanction male dominance.

In terms of empirical evidence for and against family systems approach to domestic violence, there is very little research that has examined the effectiveness of family systems approaches compared to other types of therapy. In addition, there has been very little clinical research comparing conjoint versus individual treatment for domestic violence. According to their review of the literature, Feldman & Ridley (1995) cite only one published experimental outcome study conducted by Harris, Savage, Jones, and Brooke (1988) on the efficacy of different treatment formats. In this study (N=81), couples were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: a) conjoint group treatment program; b) individual couples counseling; or, c) wait-list control group. The results showed a significant improvement among the couples, but the two treatment groups did NOT differ from each other in reducing physical violence or improving the level of psychological well-being at posttest or at 6 months follow-up. One difference that was noted, however, was the significantly higher drop-out rate in the individual couples treatment group (77%) compared to the conjoint group treatment program (16%). The main finding from this study was that there was no difference between the two formats: individual-couples counseling format and group counseling format produced similar (though beneficial) outcomes.

Because of the paucity of research in this area, Feldman and Ridley (1995) also cited an unpublished study as well (O'Leary & Neidig, 1993) which examined treatment outcomes for two types of formats. Couples (N=27) were randomly assigned to two conditions: a conjoint group or a gender-specific group. The conjoint group showed more improvement compared to the gender-specific group (i.e., greater reduction in physical

aggression). However, both groups did show significant reductions in physical and psychological aggression, marital distress, and depressive symptomatology. In sum, the family systems approaches have stirred up quite a bit of controversy in their applicability to domestic violence cases. However, the verdict is still out with respect to whether or not systems approaches are truly effective compared to other types of therapy or treatment formats, and more outcome research is greatly needed in this area.

Thus, to briefly summarize, this paper has explored: the scope of the problem of domestic violence; its epidemiology for both the general US population and two Asian American ethnic groups; family influences on domestic violence among Asian Americans; risk factors for domestic violence in Asian American families; and, family systems interventions. In conclusion, I offer here some directions for future research. First, as evident from the review above, there is an urgent need for more empirical research on domestic violence among Asian American families. More nationally representative information is needed on the epidemiology of domestic violence among Asian Americans, as well as baseline prevalence rates among specific Asian ethnic groups (particularly in light of differing cultural norms). Furthermore, the theoretical basis of this literature requires strengthening (e.g., the mere definition of abuse and violence needs clarification) and more specific explanatory models of domestic violence with Asian Americans should be empirically tested, especially with regard to identification of causal factors. In addition, there is a complete lack of research on treatment effectiveness of culturally responsive interventions for Asian Americans, and this gap should also be addressed.

The United Nations (1993) has also outlined research priorities for the study of domestic violence world-wide. Some of their recommendations include the call for more

treatment outcome, efficacy, and effectiveness studies that can examine current strategies for treating domestic violence and respond to questions of how we can improve services. Cross-cultural research is also strongly encouraged; specifically, they call for comparative studies of different ethnic groups within the same society, studies that assess the relationship between domestic violence and specific social, economic, and cultural contexts, culture-specific case studies, longitudinal studies of families in specific cultural contexts, and world-wide comparisons of domestic violence in various societies. Hopefully, with this increased attention to domestic violence at both global and local levels, the silence can be broken and the violence stopped.

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